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# Landscape of the Levant: A Russian View

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## LANDSCAPE OF THE LEVANT: A RUSSIAN VIEW

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THEOPHILUS C. PROUSIS<sup>1</sup>

European travel literature on the Levant provides one of the most accessible, if not always accurate, sources for studying life and society in the Ottoman world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The prospects of adventure, trade, and pilgrimage attracted generations of European men and women, many of whom recorded their impressions of places and peoples encountered in the Near East. In view of Russia's proximity to the Ottoman Empire, not to mention Russian religious and cultural ties with the sultan's Eastern Orthodox Christians, travelers from Muscovite and Imperial Russia visited the Ottoman realm, and many of them, drawn to classical, biblical, and Byzantine sites, described what they saw, heard, and sensed.<sup>2</sup> This article shares excerpts from a virtually neglected Russian account, penned by writer and diplomat Dmitrii V. Dashkov (1784-1839), who toured Ottoman Palestine in 1820; his travelogue merits attention for its eyewitness observation, telling detail, and vivid commentary on several topics, including the natural landscapes of Jerusalem and its environs. The Dashkov narrative offers but one example of the wealth of Slavic and Orthodox resources, both published and unpublished, that bear significance for the study of specific topics in Ottoman and Mediterranean history.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For an introduction to the extensive Russian travel literature on Palestine and the wider Near East, see Stavrou and Weisensel 1986.

<sup>3</sup> Russian and Western scholars have integrated Russian archival, manuscript, travel, and other primary sources in their studies of specific aspects of Imperial Russia's relationship with Eastern Orthodox lands in the Ottoman Empire. See Arsh 1970; Dostian 1978; Stanislavskaja 1976; Fadeev 1958; Sheremet 1975; Batalden 1982; Bruess 1970; Prousis 1994; Goldfrank 1994; Weisensel 1995; MacKenzie 2002; Jelavich 1991.

An enlightened state official who participated in the literary and cultural ferment of early nineteenth-century Russia, Dashkov served a six-year term as diplomatic adviser and secretary at the Russian Embassy in Istanbul from 1817 to 1822. Ambassador Grigorii A. Stroganov (1770-1857) assigned Dashkov to inspect Russia's consulates in the Levant as part of the embassy's effort to upgrade the conduct and competence of a poorly trained consular staff.<sup>4</sup> The expedition entailed a stop in Palestine, where, as part of his itinerary, inspector Dashkov had to gather concrete information on the seemingly endless "monks' quarrel," the dispute between Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and other Christian denominations over the right to control various holy places in Jerusalem, most notably the tomb of Christ in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. While Dashkov's unpublished correspondence with Stroganov and Levantine consuls deals in great detail with the investigation of mismanaged consulates, his published descriptions of the excursion, appearing in Russia's foremost literary almanac of the era, *Northern Flowers*, relate impressions and observations of Mount Athos, the Topkapi Library, and Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup>

For three weeks, in August and September 1820, Dashkov toured fabled sites in and around the Holy City: Mount Zion, Bethlehem, Gethsemane, Mount of Olives, Jericho, the Jordan River, and the Dead Sea. With keen perception, lyricism, and erudition, his chronicle evokes some of the sights, sounds, and struggles of arguably the world's most

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<sup>4</sup> On Dashkov's inspection of consulates, as well as his sundry writings and memoranda on Near Eastern affairs, see Prousis 2002, largely based on Dashkov's personal *fond* in the Russian State Historical Archive, St. Petersburg.

<sup>5</sup> Dashkov published the following articles in *Severnye tsvety* (*Northern Flowers*): "Afonskaia gora. Otryvok iz puteshestviia po Gretsii v 1820 godu," (1825:119-61), with descriptions of the monasteries on Mount Athos, the fount of Orthodox spirituality; "Izvestiia o grecheskikh i latinskikh rukopisiakh v seral'skoi biblioteke," (1825:162-65), and "Eshche neskol'ko slov o seral'skoi biblioteke," (1826:283-96), on Latin and Greek manuscripts in the Topkapi Library, Istanbul; and "Russkie poklonniki v Ierusalime. Otryvok iz puteshestviia po Gretsii i Palestine v 1820 godu," (1826:214-83), reprinted as a supplement to *Russkii arkhiv* (1881:203-69). *Northern Flowers* was edited and published by the poet and critic Anton A. Del'vig (1798-1831). Most of the eclectic offerings in Del'vig's anthology--poetry, prose, essays, criticism, historical sketches, travelogues, translations and adaptations from Chateaubriand, Byron, and other contemporary authors--were inspired by Romanticism, the predominant style of the era. See Mersereau 1967.

contested “battlegrounds of memory.”<sup>6</sup> Dashkov combines vignettes of the natural landscape with geographic, topographical, and historical particulars on the prominent landmarks. He comments on local customs and shares anecdotal information on noteworthy persons and places encountered during the journey. Citing Old and New Testaments, Vergil and Petrarch, Tasso and Milton, Gibbon and Chateaubriand, as well as previous Russian pilgrims, the work displays a sharp eye for detail, an aesthetic sensibility, and vivid descriptive power. The account echoes conventional images and prevalent biases in European travel writing on the Ottoman Empire during the period of imperial decline and the breakdown of once effective ruling institutions. Dashkov paints a negative picture of the “oriental other” and “the sick man of Europe,” accenting episodes of oppression, extortion, and related abuses of power by regional administrative officials, in this case Palestine’s chief authority, the pasha of Damascus and Acre.<sup>7</sup>

Much of the travelogue focuses on the shrines venerated by Christians, Jews, and Muslims. While tolerant and respectful of all three faiths, Dashkov harshly criticizes the rivalry among Christian communities over worship and custodial rights at sacred sites. Deep-seated resentment, malice, and bitterness, shared by all sides in this internecine squabble, offer little hope of forbearance or reconciliation between Latins, Greeks, and other feuding denominations. Ironically, as he notes, the disputes over the holy places occur within the context of Islam’s tolerance toward Christianity and Judaism. Lastly, Dashkov provides specific data on Russia’s pilgrims—their itinerary, expenses, lodging, and worship at different sites.

Though most of the report deals with the holy places and the disputes among feuding groups, his most evocative passages bring to life the physical and natural setting. Travel writer and diplomat Dashkov became a descriptive artist, using words instead of canvas and color to

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<sup>6</sup> Elon 1995 and Idinopulos 1994. Also see the collection of travel excerpts in Peters 1985.

<sup>7</sup> For the perceptions of European travelers on the Ottoman Empire in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Cunningham 1993. Also useful on European attitudes towards Muslims in general and Ottoman Turks in particular are Said 1979; Daniel 1966; and Wheatcroft 1995. Dashkov’s account of Palestine belongs to the larger story of Europe’s renewed interest in Jerusalem and the holy places in the nineteenth century. See Ben-Arieh 1979 and Shepherd 1987.

paint powerful images of valleys, mountains, plains, streams, and other faces of the terrain. His landscapes resonate with Romantic qualities, above all fascination with the “exotic” and the “picturesque” and reverence for the power, mystery, and primitive beauty of nature. On the road from Jaffa to Jerusalem, Dashkov traverses “deep hollows on the bottom of parched streams,” a place with the “look of a wilderness” where “the whistling wind and the piercing bark of jackals muffle the clamor of escorts and the clatter of horses’ hoofs.” Upon arrival near the Holy City, and struck by the area’s barren scenery, Dashkov paints an indelible picture of “mountains, precipices, ravines without greenery, nearly treeless, everywhere blanketed with round stones.” His tour of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea left lasting impressions of what he, and other pilgrims, had to endure during their travels over sacred ground: “unbearable heat,” an “impenetrable scorching sky,” pathways along “shifting sand snow-white from its coat of salt,” an area devoid of “any vestiges of life: no coolness or freshness; no wild animals, birds, or plants.”

Dashkov’s work helped make travel writing on the Levant a popular genre in Russian letters of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Countless scholars, writers, artists, diplomats, officers, as well as monks, clergy, and lay persons, toured the Near East, in particular Palestine, and many of their accounts provide rich detail on contemporary life, society, and landscapes.<sup>8</sup> Their impressions and observations, Dashkov’s as well, shed light on the variety of interests that shaped Russia’s involvement in the Eastern Question.

In preparing these selected passages for publication, I have worked from the Dashkov text included in a recently published anthology of nineteenth-century Russian travel literature on the holy lands.<sup>9</sup> I have endeavored to translate the narrative into clear and idiomatic English without altering its fundamental meaning or essence. Though in a few spots I have changed Dashkov’s sentence structure, syntax, and punctuation to make the composition more readable, I have generally

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<sup>8</sup> For a guide to this travel literature, Stavrou and Weisensel 1986. On Imperial Russia’s activities in Palestine, see Stavrou 1963; Hopwood 1969; Batalden and Palma 1993; and Lisovoi 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Urguzova *et al.* 1995:17-36, 289-300. This noteworthy anthology, with explanatory notes and a helpful introduction, contains passages from the Near Eastern travels of Osip I. Senkovskii, Andrei N. Murav’ev, Avraam S. Norov, and Petr A. Viazemskii.

remained faithful to the author's writing style, including his use of exclamation marks. Any material in parenthesis is part of Dashkov's original text; I have added brackets for my own emendations, translations of foreign terms, and brief explications. The occasional ellipsis denotes a word or phrase I considered extraneous, Dashkov's scholarly references which I have inserted in the notes, or Dashkov's own ellipsis in the original text. I have retained his notes, either summarizing or translating them, and have added some notes of my own for supplemental information and relevant sources on particular topics.

All dates are in the Old Style Julian calendar, which in the nineteenth century lagged twelve days behind the New Style Gregorian calendar. Clarification is needed on Dashkov's usage of the term "Turks." Frequently, he is referring to Ottoman Muslims, both Turks and Arabs; yet in some cases he differentiates between the two groups, as when he mentions Arab Muslims of Jerusalem or bedouin Arab tribes of Palestine. More confusion reigns when he cites "Greeks," "Greek religion," or "Greek church." The official Ottoman designation for Orthodox Christian subjects, *Millet-i Rum*, or Greek *millet*, encompassed all Orthodox believers in the sultan's realm, including Serbs, Romanians, Bulgars, Vlachs, Albanians, Arabs, as well as Greeks.<sup>10</sup> Since Greeks or Hellenized Orthodox often controlled the patriarchates, coffers, and administrative offices of the church's ecclesiastical hierarchy until the latter part of the nineteenth century, it was quite common for travelers and scholars to use "Greek faith" or "Greek church" to signify the Eastern Orthodox church in Ottoman-ruled lands. Thus, for Dashkov, "Greek religion" and "Greek church" are usually synonymous with the Eastern Orthodox faith and church in the Ottoman Empire, while "Greeks" often refers to Ottoman Orthodox Christians.

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<sup>10</sup> Clogg 1982, 1: 185-202.

**DMITRII V. DASHKOV, “Russkie poklonniki v Ierusalem. Otryvok iz puteshestviia po Gretsii i Palestine v 1820 godu” (“Russian Pilgrims in Jerusalem. An Excerpt from a Journey to Greece and Palestine in 1820”)**

Anyone who has never been at sea cannot readily fathom that a beautiful summer day can sometimes seem more unbearable than bad weather in winter. Yet we discovered this firsthand during the tedious crossing from Rhodes to Jaffa. A calm sea caught us unawares in view of the fortress of Castel-Rosso, on the coast of Karamania, and for five whole days we could not move from this spot.<sup>11</sup> Our eyes wearied from the monotony in every aspect of nature—from morning till evening the sea gleamed like a looking-glass, while the sky was cloudless. The intolerable heat and stuffiness in the cabin, the sweltering intense heat on the deck (where melting tar bubbled on the ropes and planks), [and] the mournful tap of sails on the masts aroused despondency in us and made us regret the storms we had contended with in these very same places en route from Egypt to the Morea....[Just] like those times when, after a storm of passions, in moral slumber and with disgust for what had previously captivated us, we regret the profound misfortunes that have shaken our existence but elevated the soul!... Eventually, a slight breeze helped us enter the pier at Castel-Rosso, where with difficulty we stocked up on fetid water. The fortress stands on a small craggy island, looking as though it has been torn from the mainland, and the inhabitants must get necessary provisions from afar.

We continued to idle for more than a day opposite the southern promontory of Cyprus (Cao Gatte), waiting for a fair wind.<sup>12</sup> A powerful sea current pulled the ship westward and carried us away from [our] desired destination. The Syrian coast did not come into view until 20 August [1820]: first, the summit of Mount Carmel appeared to the left; then, directly in front of us, the whitish seacoast of Caesarea; and to the right the range of lofty mountains near Jerusalem. With intensity and avid curiosity we gazed upon this land, so consequential in the history

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<sup>11</sup> Castel-Rosso, or Kastelorizon, is the Italian name for a small Greek island off the coast of Turkey. Karamania, the coastal area of southcentral Turkey, is named after the town of Karaman.

<sup>12</sup> Cao Gatte, or Cape of Cats, lies near the Monastery of St. Nicholas. According to medieval legend, monks relied on cats to attack the many snakes of the region.

of mankind, rich in wonders and in monumental events, cradle of the Christian faith; the land where the legends of the Old and New Testaments live, where every hill, every thicket, every ruin resonate with deeds of the prophets and of celebrated heroes.

The entire area, from Sur (ancient Tyre) to Gaza, is extremely dangerous for vessels during the stormy season; and Greek sailors, excluding the daring islanders from Hydra, Psara, and Spetsae, were on the whole inexperienced seafarers outside the archipelago at that time. Fortunately, our *karavokyris* (captain of the ship), a native of Skiathos, had already brought worshipers to Jaffa on several occasions and, with firm knowledge of these parts, pledged to steer the ship to the roadstead even at night. He kept his word and at daybreak dropped anchor one or two *verst*s from town.<sup>13</sup> We made it to shore with him in a small boat, maneuvering carefully between huge boulders against which the waves crashed with a roar, and stopped for a rest at the Greek *metochion* [monastic residence, cloister, or living quarters where pilgrims stayed], where the abbot received us with hospitality. With his help, we dispatched to the episcopal deputies in Jerusalem the certificate from Most Blessed Patriarch Polykarp,<sup>14</sup> informing them of our visit.

Jaffa (ancient Joppa) was once a focal point of trade between Palestine, Egypt, and adjacent islands. Today, under the negligent and rapacious rule of the Turks, the wharf is covered with sand and comes to life only during the passage of pilgrims. The town is built with terraces, almost all hewn from stone, with a deep moat and a wall that abuts the sea on both sides; the streets are narrow, while the houses are unsightly and look as if they have been crushed by the flat roofs. Yet the outskirts, on the road to Jerusalem, are attractive: from the very [town] gates extend the large gardens and vineyards praised by all travelers.

We found the inhabitants [of Jaffa] in a state of confusion and fear. Abdullah, the new pasha of Damascus and Acre (Jaffa is under his jurisdiction), having disregarded the important services rendered to him by a Jew named Chaim, ordered this unfortunate soul killed and his corpse

<sup>13</sup> One *verst* is the equivalent of around 3,500 feet.

<sup>14</sup> Dashkov gives the full title of the patriarch of Jerusalem in this explanatory note: "Most Blessed and Most Holy Father and Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and of all Palestine, Syria, Arabia beyond the Jordan River, Galilean Canaan, and Holy Zion." When the patriarch of Jerusalem transferred his residence to Istanbul, church affairs in Jerusalem were handled by two episcopal deputies.



thrown into the sea; all religious believers, Greeks as well as Muslims, regretted the undeserved execution of a person who had been a benefactor to them.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, a detachment of troops suddenly encircled the town of Safed [Zefat], populated by Jews, and forcibly collected from them a tribute payment equivalent to a ten-year tax levy. Turks and foreign merchants did not escape abuse; European consuls, persons of little significance and timid, did not dare resist, and all authorities trembled before the new ruler, whose illegal absolute power and rage threatened Palestine with a second Ahmet Cezzar Pasha.<sup>16</sup> But for us these circumstances were propitious. The *mütesellim* (deputy governor) of Jaffa, afraid to cause complaints, swiftly took measures to protect us from any sort of disturbance all the way to Jerusalem and sternly prohibited Arab sheiks from demanding the customary *kafaro*, or road dues, which Russian subjects have been released [from paying] by Article Eight of the Treaty of Kutchuk-Kainardji.<sup>17</sup>

Having procured, for a moderate price, the necessary horses and camels, we left Jaffa before evening on 22 August, accompanied by an official from the *mütesellim* and by monastic *dragomans* [interpreters], and rode past the lovely Sharon Valley to Ramleh (ancient Arimathea);

<sup>15</sup> Dashkov elaborates this incident in a footnote. "Chaim enjoyed the trust of the previous pashas, Cezzar and Suleiman, but after angering Cezzar on one occasion, he lost his ears and nose. A European consul advised Chaim, in a friendly conversation, to leave for any Christian state, where his acquired wealth (the spoils of his murder!) would provide him with the means to end his days in plenty and in peace... It was not stinginess that kept Chaim in a land where the property and life of each person are in constant danger, but force of habit, blind faith in destiny, and a certain innate indifference, [all of which] comprise distinctive traits in the character of eastern [Near Eastern] peoples." Shepherd (1987:20) mentions that Cezzar (Djezzar) Pasha disfigured and mutilated the face of the Jewish banker Chaim (Haim) Farhi.

<sup>16</sup> The arbitrariness and cruelty of Abdullah, pasha of Damascus and Acre from 1819 to 1831, reminded Dashkov of the former governor of Ottoman Syria, Ahmet Cezzar Pasha (d. 1804), who brutally suppressed local risings, extended his personal rule over much of Palestine, and defended Acre against Napoleonic forces in 1799. On Ahmet Cezzar (Djezzar) Pasha, the "butcher of Acre," see Shaw 1976:253, 268-70; Ben-Arieh, 1979:26-31.

<sup>17</sup> This landmark treaty (1774), following the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-74, granted Russia wide-ranging commercial, diplomatic, and religious rights in the Ottoman Empire, including freedom of passage for Russian pilgrims to Jerusalem. Article Eight stipulated that "no...contribution, duty, or other tax shall be exacted from those pilgrims and travelers by any one whomsoever, either at Jerusalem or elsewhere, or on the road... During their sojourn in the Ottoman Empire, they shall not suffer the least wrong or injury; but, on the contrary, shall be under the strictest protection of the laws." Quoted in Hurewitz 1975:95.

we spent several hours there, waiting for the moon to appear above the horizon.<sup>18</sup> From [Ramleh] the plain rises imperceptibly to the base of the Judean mountains, barren and inhabited by sparsely populated tribes of rapacious Arabs. Entering a gorge, we saw another aspect of nature: wild places, with almost no signs of human activity, where ruins traced with shrubbery appear here and there on the hills, like graves from ancient times. The road, rocky and difficult, now winds along steep grades, now descends to deep hollows on the bottom of parched streams. This look of a wilderness, quite vividly and accurately portrayed by Chateaubriand..., imbues the soul with melancholy: there, the whistling wind and the piercing bark of jackals muffle the clamor of escorts and the clatter of horses' hoofs.<sup>19</sup>

Upon arrival in a poor Arab village, about fifteen *versts* from Jerusalem, we were stopped by order of Sheik Abu Ghush, the terror of pilgrims, with an urgent request to call on him for a rest.<sup>20</sup> We found him in a small courtyard, sitting in the shade on bast mats and surrounded by elders of his tribe. They all received us very warmly. Abu Ghush boasted of his acquaintance with the English queen, the spouse of George IV, and with the eminent Sidney Smith, displayed the gifts he had received from them-with the obvious intention of arousing our own generosity-and, treating us amicably, set out to accompany the caravan

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<sup>18</sup> The Sharon or Saron Valley, a plain along the coast of Palestine from Mount Carmel to Jaffa, is known for the "Rose of Sharon" and for its fertility in biblical times. Ramleh (Ramla today), supposedly the place of birth of Joseph of Arimathea, the disciple who provided the tomb for Christ's body after the crucifixion, became a prominent Islamic center after the Muslim conquest and served as the Arab capital of Palestine before the First Crusade.

<sup>19</sup> Though he cites the names of various travelers and scholars who wrote about the holy sites of Jerusalem, Dashkov clearly regarded the romanticized account, *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* (1811), by François René Chateaubriand (1768-1848), as one of the most valuable and perceptive travelogues he had read. Dashkov made numerous references to this hugely successful work, which appeared in twelve editions from 1811 to 1814. Ironically, Chateaubriand visited Jerusalem for only four days during his two-week tour of Palestine in 1806; yet his vivid but disparaging remarks on the region's barren landscape, poverty, misery, and lawlessness, as well as his bias against Muslims, echoed in the travel literature of countless European tourists and pilgrims, including Dashkov. For more on Chateaubriand's highly subjective account of the Holy City, see Said 1979:169-79; Peters 1985:545-46, 560-64, 578-83; Elon 1995:131-34.

<sup>20</sup> With the breakdown of Ottoman ruling institutions in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, administrative control over Palestine and Syria was endangered by bedouin tribes who disrupted trade and pilgrimage caravans in the region. To thwart

beyond the village.<sup>21</sup> He sat on a splendid horse and rode it with remarkable agility; while descending the Terebinth Valley, he rushed at full tilt down the precipitous slope, not reeling in the saddle and ceaselessly urging on the horse with wide and sharp spurs.<sup>22</sup> Bidding farewell, he promised to visit us in al-Quds, vowed never to harass Russian travelers, and asked us to put in a kind word for him with the dreaded pasha of Damascus and Acre.<sup>23</sup>

It is impossible to imagine anything more desolate than the environs of Jerusalem: mountains, precipices, ravines without greenery, nearly treeless, everywhere blanketed with round stones; it appeared as if a shower of stones had fallen from the sky upon this ungodly land. Around midday, exhausted by the intense heat, we ascended a height and saw before us a line of crenelated walls and towers, surrounded by neither settlements nor scattered huts and looking as though they were stirring slightly in the middle of the desert. Upon first glance at these ancient ramparts—the city of David, Herod, and Godfrey of Bouillon—thousands of recollections, each more vivid the other, each more holy than the other, press against the heart.<sup>24</sup> Let cold-hearted minds deride the raptures of worshipers! Here, at the foot of Zion, everyone is a Christian, everyone a believer, who has but retained an ardent heart and a love for the majestic!...

I will not begin to relate what has already been described countless times by erudite and perceptive travelers, about which so many have argued and continue to argue, expounding differently the tales of the

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these disorders, the Ottoman government selected various families and tribes to safeguard these routes. The tribe headed by Abu Ghush was assigned to police the pilgrimage road from Jaffa to Jerusalem, an appointment abused by the sheik to squeeze excessive tolls and dues from Christian worshipers. See Asali 1997:200-27, especially 208-09; and Peters 1985:543-45.

<sup>21</sup> Sir Sidney Smith (1764-1840) was the English admiral who successfully defended the fortress of Acre from Napoleon's army in 1799. Dashkov's footnote mentions that Smith gave sheik Abu Ghush an offprint inscribed with Arabic quotations from the Koran in praise of Christians and their zeal for prayer.

<sup>22</sup> The Terebinth is the valley where David gathered stones for his sling before the battle with Goliath.

<sup>23</sup> Dashkov's explanatory note correctly states that Muslims considered Jerusalem a holy city, ranked with Mecca and Medina as the most important sacred centers of the Islamic faith. Muslims call Jerusalem al-Quds ("The Holy One"), Bait al-Maqdis ("City of the Sanctuary"), and Haram al-Sharif ("Noble Sanctuary").

<sup>24</sup> David, the second king of Israel and Judah after Saul, captured the fortress of Zion and supposedly wrote the Psalms. Herod the Great was king of Judea (37-4 B.C.) during

ancients. Every pace in the new [city of] Jerusalem is measured; but the extent of the old city is still subject to question, and the whereabouts of some spots, mentioned in the Old Testament and the Gospels, have not been satisfactorily determined. We know that the new city encompasses only a portion of the former [city], destroyed by Titus in 71 A.D. [sic]. Flavius Josephus...asserts that the circumference of the walls comprised thirty-three stadia [somewhat more than 6.5 miles]; today it measures, according to the testimony of Maundrell, only 4,630 standard paces, or around three *versts*.<sup>25</sup> Some critics, trying to reconcile on-site observations with the text of the Jewish historian, reduce the dimensions of his stadia; others simply accuse him of inaccuracy and exaggeration-though experience has proven that one should never be so quick to criticize ancient writers and that the most recent exact surveys have often corroborated their information, which had seemed like fables to us. The inquisitive can get an idea about the debates, which form the basis of various scholarly opinions on the location of Mount Zion, Golgotha, and related sites, having read the essay by d'Anville...and the article by Ritter...<sup>26</sup> Chateaubriand accepts the authority of the former in everything...<sup>27</sup>

The curiosity of travelers is drawn to the ancient edifices within the walls [of Jerusalem], especially to the fortified bastion, supposedly the home of David, and to the renowned mosque of Umar. The former, according to the opinion of d'Anville, is situated on the same spot where the Citadel of the king-psalmist [David], and subsequently the Psephinus Tower, once stood and where, at sunrise, one could see all the way to the borders of Arabia, to the sea, and to the furthest edge of the land of

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the time of Jesus, while his son Herod Antipas ruled Galilee from 4 B.C. to 39 A.D. Godfrey of Bouillon, leader of the First Crusade, conquered Jerusalem in 1099 and became the first Latin ruler of the Holy City and defender of the Lord's Tomb.

<sup>25</sup> Dashkov refers to two of the most reliable sources on the topography and circumference of Jerusalem: *The Jewish War* by Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (37-100 A.D.), and *A Journey from Aleppo to Jerusalem, at Easter, A.D. 1697* (1703) by Henry Maundrell (1665-1701), chaplain of the Aleppo factory of the English Levant Company. For more on these works, see Peters 1985:42-43, 67-72, 77-89, 516-24. A standard pace, covered by a step or a stride, is generally estimated at around three feet, in contrast to the Roman or geometric pace, which measures about five feet.

<sup>26</sup> Dashkov cites the scholarly writings of French geographer and cartographer Jean-Baptiste Bourguignon d'Anville (1697-1782) (*Dissertation sur l'étendue de l'ancienne Jérusalem et de son temple*, 1747) and of German geographer Karl Ritter (1779-1859) (*Einleitung zur allgemeinen vergleichenden Geographie*, 1817-18).

Judea...<sup>28</sup> The view from the present-day stronghold encompasses all of the environs; in between and beyond the tops of the nearby stony hills another mountain range rises up, just as barren, on which the remains of old towers and fallen minarets are visible...

The Valley of Jehoshaphat, covered in ruins, separates the Mount of Olives, shaded in places with olive trees, from Zion and Moriah. A turbid stream, supposedly the brook of Kedron, flows in the middle of the valley during rainy season; but it dries up altogether in summer and fall. The masterly pen of Chateaubriand vividly depicted this thicket where, according to the prophet Joel, the entire human race will be assembled at some point for judgment:

The stones in the cemetery of the Jews are piled up, like a heap of fragments, at the base of the settlement of Siloam; it is difficult to distinguish the huts themselves from the graves that surround them. Three ancient monuments tower above this field of destruction, the tombs of Zechariah, Jehoshaphat, and Absalom. Before one's eyes lies sad Jerusalem, over which the slightest smoke is not visible [and] from which not a sound is heard; gazing at the desolation of the mountains, where there is no living creature, and at all those graves in disorder, broken, smashed to bits, ajar, it is possible to imagine that the sound of a trumpet has already resounded, calling to judgment, and that the dead are ready to rise from the valley...<sup>29</sup>

Before leaving this memorable land, we wanted to see the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. We knew that in summer predatory Arabs migrate with their flocks from the river to the mountaintops and that the road is less dangerous than in spring. We were also assured of this by the esteemed archbishop of Petra, who had recently returned from

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<sup>27</sup> While he praised Chateaubriand's depiction of Palestine, Dashkov thought otherwise about the French writer's melancholy and personalized portrait of Greece: "In general, the information of Chateaubriand on present-day Jerusalem is as exact and accurate as his report on Greece is incorrect and superficial. We ourselves saw many examples of this in the Morea." Said and Peters (see above, note 18) have argued that the same criticism applies to Chateaubriand's work on Jerusalem.

<sup>28</sup> In addition to d'Anville, Dashkov cites *The Jewish War* by Flavius Josephus.

<sup>29</sup> Dashkov does not provide a citation for this Chateaubriand passage. I have translated Dashkov's Russian rendition of Chateaubriand's evocative vignette.

his diocese, but he advised that we request escorts from the Turkish authorities. Everything was arranged as we wished.

On 7 September, we were met by several persons from the *mütesellim*'s guard, including his chief of police, all of them on magnificent horses. [Also accompanying us] were a monastic *dragoman* and two sheiks from the Arab tribes that had migrated beyond the Jordan River. Waiting until the intense midday heat had passed, we set out on the road near Gethsemane, on the right-hand side of the Mount of Olives; in the evening we stopped to rest at a well outside an abandoned caravanserai. Here, three or four months before our arrival, a young Englishman, who had no one with him except a manservant and a janissary, had been robbed. Defending himself stubbornly, he wounded one of the brigands with a saber and as punishment received the exact same wound from them: an example of justice, worthy of these primitive sons of nature [*dikikh synov prirody*]! From there we traveled across slopes and ravines to a large plain surrounding Jericho, and by midnight we reached the pitiful remains of this once renowned town.

The local *aga* [title for a minor military or administrative official] amicably ordered us to his residence—a tower, where peasants with their herds seek shelter from rapacious forays. [Our] supper and lodging were on the overhead landing under the open sky. At dawn everything around us came to life; the escorts hastened to saddle the horses, while we marveled at the lovely views from our lofty bedroom. Trees and shrubs turned green in the valley, [and] wild boars roamed cultivated fields all the way to huts. On the other side of the Jordan River, a large forest cast dark shadows; and directly in front of us, between two rows of mountains, the Dead Sea brilliantly reflected the rays of the rising sun. Legends of sacred antiquity framed a picture of rural life. A majestic Arab, a descendant of Ishmael, half-naked, with a long gun across his shoulders, drove goats and sheep to pasture near the stream made famous by the miracle of the prophet Elijah; others dug garden beds, perhaps at the [very] spot where Rahab's house stood and where the Levites carried the Ark of the Covenant during the destruction of Jericho....While leaving the town, we came across women with earthenware pitchers on their heads walking to fetch water and [wearing] dark blue, loose-fitting garments, with the veils folded back; our approach did not alarm them. One word, *hadji* (pilgrim), satisfied the curiosity of everyone and put an end to any questions.

The broad plain separating the Jericho oasis from the Jordan River resembles the bottom of a sea forsaken by the waves; tamarinds, which ordinarily grow along brooks, and prickly blackthorn can be seen here and there near sandy knolls. A great many monasteries and *skity* (*eremitoria graciosa*) [pious hermitages] were located in this wilderness during the days of Christian rule; traces of them are barely visible today. The site of the Savior's baptism, according to the Greeks, is five or six *versts* from the ruins of the cloister of St. Gerasimos;<sup>30</sup> upon reaching it, we descended a precipitous bank, with reeds and small shrubs scattered below, and waded to the opposite, more sloped shore.

The upper reaches of the Jordan lie at the foot of the wooded Hermon and Anti-Lebanon mountains; from there the river courses southward in a straight line, passes through Lake Tiberias (Gennesaret), and, like a chain, connects [the lake] to the Dead Sea. In summer this celebrated river is no wider than ten *sazhens* [around 21 meters]<sup>31</sup> and of medium depth, but it flows with remarkable swiftness along the stony bottom; when the snows of Lebanon begin to melt, it runs twice as fast. We bathed in [the river] and then, following custom, filled our *chotry* (flat traveling utensils) with some of its turbid but pleasant water.<sup>32</sup> Worshipers who are not satisfied with this [ritual] also soak sheets here and are then supposed to use them as a burial shroud.

The brooks flowing into the Jordan for the most part dry up in the hot weather; the surrounding sands are completely parched. [The river's] estuary is marked on the surface of the Dead Sea by a long streak—as if the waters, sacred from earliest times, petrify when they join the accursed waves of the lake that inundated Sodom and Gomorrah. In the past people thought that [the river] continued its course underground and merged with the Nile in Egypt or the Pharro [Euphrates] in Syria...<sup>33</sup> But, in addition to other proof refuting this

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<sup>30</sup> St. Gerasimos, a fifth-century hermit, founded a monastery near the Jordan River; attacked on many occasions by bedouin tribes, the cloister was finally abandoned in the sixteenth century.

<sup>31</sup> A *sazhen* is the equivalent of around 2.133 meters.

<sup>32</sup> According to Dashkov, "this water did not taste salty, as Chateaubriand reports, though we were at the Jordan River at roughly the same time of the year. Lying nearly still, the water becomes completely limpid and a darkish silt covers the bottom of [our] utensils."

<sup>33</sup> Pharro is most likely a corruption of al-Furat, Arabic for Euphrates. Dashkov draws his information from the research of German geographer Ritter (see above, note 26).

opinion, we know from the evidence of eyewitnesses that the Dead Sea rises and falls depending on the rise and fall of the Jordan.

The river bends to the left not far from the estuary, and only the tops of shrubs reveal its direction; we set out straight ahead, without any road, along shifting sand snow-white from its coat of salt. The heat was unbearable. The sun glowed in the impenetrable scorching sky as at sunset. On one side, the range of Arabian mountains—a steep wall without distinct peaks, without teeth and ridges—extends along the lake like an immeasurable border. On the other, by the magical play of nature, the chalky hills display pitched tents, small fortresses, and towers adorned with cornices. Everything here is unlike any other place on earth. Even in the plains of the Sahara, the proximity of water changes the aspect of nature: moisture penetrates the desiccated pebbles and blankets them with green grass; the putrid air becomes pure; living creatures find refuge in palm groves; and the barren desert is transformed into a flowering oasis—the image of paradise. On the contrary, the environs of the Dead Sea are desolate and deprived of any vestiges of life: no coolness or freshness; no wild animals, birds, or plants; shriveled trees, uprooted along the bank, washed ashore by a wave from the eastern edge or perhaps by the Jordan during a flood. The water is clear, but saturated with bitter salts. It is difficult to believe what Pococke<sup>34</sup> and Chateaubriand heard from a monk and from some Bethlehem Arabs, that fish abound in [the sea]; the guides told us that even those [fish] approaching by chance from the river die immediately.

The Dead Sea (in Arabic Bahr al-Lut, or the Sea of Lot) extends nearly seventy-five *versts* in length and about twenty *versts* in width; Seetzen surmises that its circumference can be traversed in a five-day journey.<sup>35</sup> This most recent traveler, and as far back as abbot Daniil who visited the Monastery of St. Sabas,<sup>36</sup> collected fairly elaborate information on [the sea's] southern tip, partly confirmed for us by residents of Jerusalem who had traveled to Petra. It indeed terminates in a narrow bay, which in summer can be crossed by wading up to the

<sup>34</sup> English orientalist and traveler Richard Pococke (1704-65) visited the Near East in 1734-40 and published *Description of the East* (1743-45).

<sup>35</sup> German traveler Ulrich Seetzen (1767-1811) toured Palestine in 1806, the same year as Chateaubriand. Excerpts from Seetzen are in Peters 1985:544-45, 550-56, 564-72, 581-82.

<sup>36</sup> Abbot Daniil visited many of the holy sites in Palestine in the early twelfth century and authored the earliest extant Russian pilgrimage account of Jerusalem. Daniil spent



knee. The strange sight of salt clumps, discarded by the lake, of course gave cause for the oft-repeated story of worshipers having seen the pillar [that had once been] Lot's wife. As for the famous fruit of Sodom, no one agrees with the opinion of Chateaubriand. The blackened, bitter seeds from the small lemons he found do not resemble ashes, and on the whole his account does not correspond with our notion of the deceptive apple, ripe on the outside, rotten inside—like the joys of the world, remarks one traveler.

We spent the night again in Jericho and on the next day returned to Jerusalem along a new route, by way of the Monastery of St. Sabas. A deep ravine known as the Valley of Sorrow extends all the way from the stream of Kedron to the Dead Sea; along [the ravine's] parched bottom we approached the cloister, built with terraces on a terrifying steep slope, and climbed upward, quaking involuntarily at each turn. The entire structure, enveloped by high walls, looks more like a fortified castle than a sanctuary for peaceful monks. Following the abbot along steps carved into the stone, we venerated relics of the holy fathers, persecuted by the infidels, and the tomb of St. Sabas; we saw the cave of this devout toiler and the date palm tree he himself had planted. At the highest point stand two four-cornered turrets used by the monks as watchtowers. The neighboring hills are hollowed out with a great many caves where nearly ten thousand anchorites once lived.

[The monks] also showed us the opening, from which they distribute bread daily to Arabs who have settled not far from here. A long time ago (so they maintain), [Byzantine] Greek emperors assigned this tribe to the monastery for service, which explains why they received food from it. Nowadays, however, they demand it with threats, as though it were tribute that belongs to them; mothers bring newborn infants to the opening and take leftovers for them. In the event of a quarrel with the monks, these half-primitive Muslims [*poludikie musul'mane*] lay siege to [the monastery] and cut off communication with Jerusalem.

October 2003

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over a year at the monastery founded by St. Sabas (439-532), a charismatic hermit and one of the most influential figures in the history of early monasticism in Palestine. On Daniil and St. Sabas, see Stavrou and Weisensel 1986:1-5; Peters 1985:162-63, 263-67, 313-14; and Patrich 1995.

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